

# The Balancing Act: Preserving Personal Authenticity in the Workplace

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# Introduction

Thank you to Out & Equal Workplace Advocates  
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# Overview

Upon completion of this workshop, you will be able to:

- Identify the main strategies used in sexual identity management
- Examine an incident of personal importance
- Describe how you might approach the incident differently in the future
- Articulate how you could maintain your personal authenticity while managing your sexual identity.

# Session Purpose

To create a space for reflection so you may thoughtfully evaluate your own sexual identity management.

# Background of the Study

- Workplace practices
- LGBTQ executives' workplace experiences are unique
  - Executives are more visible
  - Serve at the pleasure of the board
  - Fewer leadership opportunities for women
  - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered are a highly emotional words

# Significance of the Problem

- 10% to 14% of US workers are identified as homosexual
- A significant career challenge for sexual minorities
- Sexual identity is complex
- Little scholarly research exists

# Disclosure Debate

## Those Favoring Non-Disclosure

- Legitimate reasons to be fearful about consequences of disclosure
- Concealing is a prudent strategy

## Those Favoring Disclosure

- Claim non-disclosure reinforces stereotypes
- Disservice to gay-rights movement

# Sexual Identity Management

- ▣ Decision to disclose is a complex issue
- ▣ Assessment of risks and potential consequences
  - Fear of appearing inauthentic
  - Fear of losing one's leadership position
  - Fear of losing promotions
  - Fear of isolation
- ▣ Workplace factors
  - Climate
  - Social support

# Sexual Identity Management

- ▣ Identified strategies for sexual identity management
  - Passing
  - Covering
  - Implicitly out
  - Explicitly out



Griffin

# Sexual Identity Management

- Theoretical approach to invisible identity management
- Similarities among sexual identity, physical ability, multiracial identities
- Threat of stigmatization versus authenticity



Clair



Beatty



MacLean

# Sexual Identity Management

- ▣ Invisible stigmatized identities and psychological stress
  - Identity denial
    - ▣ Psychological stress
  - Identity disconnects
    - ▣ Uncertainty
  - Identity integration
    - ▣ Positive psychological outcomes



Ragins

# Findings

## ▣ Workplace Sexual Identity Management Experiences

### ● Four dimensions

1. Navigating intersections of multiple identities with workplace sexual identity management
2. Reactions of others to participants' workplace sexual identity management
3. Participants' feelings related to their workplace sexual identity management
4. Strategies used to manage sexual identity in the workplace

# Findings

1. Navigating intersections of multiple identities with workplace sexual identity management
  - Organizational position
    - ▣ Disclosing a lesbian identity became less threatening
    - ▣ Felt obligation to tackle homophobia

# Findings

“Do I want to make an issue out of being a lesbian at this point? Did somebody say something insensitive? Do I want to push people to be more inclusive here? Do I want to say that in a way that identifies me or do I want to say that just as an advocate and not self-identify?”

~Rebecca

# Findings

1. Navigating intersections of multiple identities with workplace sexual identity management
  - Gender
    - ▣ Significant to 2/3 of participants
    - ▣ Disclosing helped them fit in with male-dominated leadership teams

# Findings

“My gender role tends to be more on the masculine side and the stereotypical man’s man in the corporate world”

~Amy

# Findings

“The leadership style that is most successful in the corporate environment is a very masculine style. Being a lesbian tends to fit in with that style. Certainly the company I work at has a very hard hitting, very dominant driving masculine style of leadership, with a lot of smart people and real frank talk. And so if you are perceived to be too soft or not as hard hitting, that is viewed as a strong deterrent. Here I am a female yet I get some masculine points for that lesbian part.”

~Jennifer

# Findings

1. Navigating intersections of multiple identities with workplace sexual identity management
  - Race
    - ▣ Stood out in a position of power in organization
    - ▣ Race and gender visible while sexual identity may not be
    - ▣ Conflicting stereotypes may impact identity

# Findings

“I am the African American woman and I feel like I stand out. I represent so many other underrepresented groups; I think that for the longest time people may not necessarily be aware of my lesbian identity because my oppressions as a woman and an African American were so intense.”

~Carol

# Findings

## 2. Reactions of others to participants' workplace sexual identity management

- Positive reactions
  - ▣ Respect
  - ▣ Support
- Negative reactions
  - ▣ Discomfort with a lesbian
  - ▣ Rejection

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“You can just tell when people shift in their chairs or look away.”

~Rebecca

# Findings

## 3. Participants' feelings related to workplace sexual identity management

- Positive feelings
  - ▣ Confidence
  - ▣ Detachment from caring about opinions of others

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"I don't really control what someone else thinks about who I am, but I do control how I feel about that."

~Carol

# Findings

## 3. Participants' feelings related to workplace sexual identity management

- Negative feelings
  - ▣ Anxious
  - ▣ Angry
  - ▣ Burdened
  - ▣ Conflicted
  - ▣ Disappointed
  - ▣ Betrayed
  - ▣ Regretful

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"I never really thought about why I was so driven and I wanted to make all of this money. I guess I wanted to prove to myself that I was just as good as the next person."

~Louise

# Findings

4. Strategies used to manage sexual identity in the workplace

# Findings

4. Strategies used to manage sexual identity in the workplace

“I don’t think of it as something I manage, to be honest. It is so much a part of who I am, both publicly and personally.”

~Rebecca

# Findings

4. Strategies used to manage sexual identity in the workplace
  - Driving force is the desire to be authentic

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## 4. Strategies used to manage sexual identity in the workplace

- Driving force is the desire to be authentic

“I don’t want to make my life miserable, but I also want to be myself. So you play that balancing act, you have to get to a point where in your own soul you are comfortable with a lesbian identity as well.”

~Susan

# Remaining Authentic

- LGBTQ executives strive to remain authentic in the face of dominant power structures
  - Social reality of position power
  - Authenticity as a leader
  - Management style to keep personal and professional lives separate

# Authenticity

The idea of being oneself  
or being true to oneself.

# Authentic Executive Leadership

The capacity of a leader to balance responsibilities for private freedom and public obligation.

Chester Bernard, 1938

# Authenticity in Turbulent Times

- ▣ Conflicting social pressures
- ▣ Temptation toward being inauthentic

# The Balancing Act

- ▣ Balance the private and public self
- ▣ Adapt but not change who I am
- ▣ Reconciling the tension
- ▣ Owing one's personal experience

# Working in Pairs

- ❑ Describe a recent experience.
- ❑ What were some of the things you considered when making your decision?
- ❑ What did you do?
- ❑ How did that make you feel?
- ❑ What was the reaction of others?
- ❑ How did you make sense of this experience?
- ❑ What were some of the challenges you faced?
- ❑ Did any of your other identities (gender, race, religion) affect how you handled the situation?
- ❑ Did you feel you preserved your authenticity?
- ❑ What would you do differently next time?

# Working as a Group

What did you discover?

How will you use this information in the future?

# Living with Intention

- ▣ Dominant power structures in organizations shape disclosure decisions
  - Leaders strive to balance the tension between their unique identities and the dominant power structures
  - Conscious decision making to gain/regain personal power

# Open Organizational Climate

- Aren't leaders responsible for this?
- Authentic relationships with peers and followers
- Personal values of the executive sometimes collide with the values of the organization

# Leadership Success

- Authentic leadership characterized by moral creativity of an authentic leader
- Align personal moral conviction with moral demands of organizational leadership
- Finding a substitute action which satisfies one's moral compass yet conforms with the organization's values.
- Requires mastery of balancing these tensions

# Authenticity as a Leader

- Creating an inclusive corporate culture
- Tackling homophobia
- Becoming a role model for others

# Closing Comments

- This is not a solitary journey
- Learn effective strategies
- Recognize your experiences are similar
- Make informed decisions based on thoughtful prior planning

**Thank you!**

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